THE LURE of YORK

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On the banks of the York
Is a little olde town
Just jammed with history
That folks have found.

Words under this cover are not all true,
But the thought's close enough
To cause you to read
The legends and stuff.

Stories of goblins, tales of ghosts
Transcribed for you by your host of hosts.
Yorktown Onions, Cornwallis' Cave,
To try the recipes, you need not be brave.

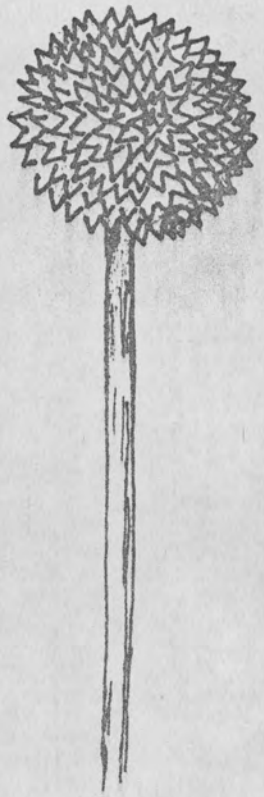
Extension homemakers in 19 clubs
Have been the wheels, the spokes and hubs
Who got together and wrote and laughed
At the irony of every paragraph.

Lots of lessons you will learn
As page by page you slowly turn.
Now look and read and you will see
York County is a good place to be.

By Kitty Monahan

Yorktown Onion

The purple-headed Yorktown Onion can be seen growing waist-high in protected patches along the Colonial Parkway from June through July. The unique onion is found only in this section of our country. It originated in southern Russia and was introduced into England in 1596; but how it found its way to the new Virginia colony is pure speculation. Possibly the seeds were in bales of hay and straw or bags of feed brought to the new country from England--or perhaps the settlers themselves were the importers.



Nevertheless, it has flourished on the banks of the York River and is called by many different names--giant wild garlic, wild leek, etc. Protected by the Park Service, it is now illegal to cut, dig, remove or destroy the onion--but you are encouraged to photograph them from any angle!

Scotch Broom

The blaze of gold bordering York County highways during late April and early May is best known as Scotch Broom. Until recent years, this shrub-like plant was found only in this area, but is now seen occasionally in other parts of the East Coast. It is said that the seeds of Scotch Broom were brought to the New World by the British Cavalry during the Revolutionary War in the sacks of feed for their horses.

CLIP AND SAVE

The dictionary below will be of great value to you should you become lost in the County's oldest town and newest city, Poquoson (pronounced by most as Po-co-son). Cut out along dotted lines and carry with you at all times. "Bull-Island" is one of the few areas in this country where you will find the vocabulary sprinkled with words that are reminiscent of the Elizabethan era.

'Bull Island' Dictionary

'At's - That is

Avalanche - Ambulance

Axially - In fact, as "axially, it was not blue, but red"

Big Woods - Section between Wythe Creek Road and Cary's Chapel of York County

Hayseeder - People who live 'up the road'

Mash - Marshland

Muddy Toad - People who live 'down the road'

New Bridge - Bridge on Wythe Creek Road going into Hampton

Old Messick - Part of town 'down the road'

Onlyist - The only one

Over Town - Hampton or Newport News

Pacorson - Native's pronunciation of City's name

Pint - Piece of land jutting out into the water, usually referring to Messick Point

Ruver - Large stream of water running into the bay, usually the Poquoson 'Ruver'

Thru Messick - On Messick Road

Thru the Ridge - On Ridge Road

Up the Road - Any part of town above schools

Wharf - Dock at end of Poquoson Avenue

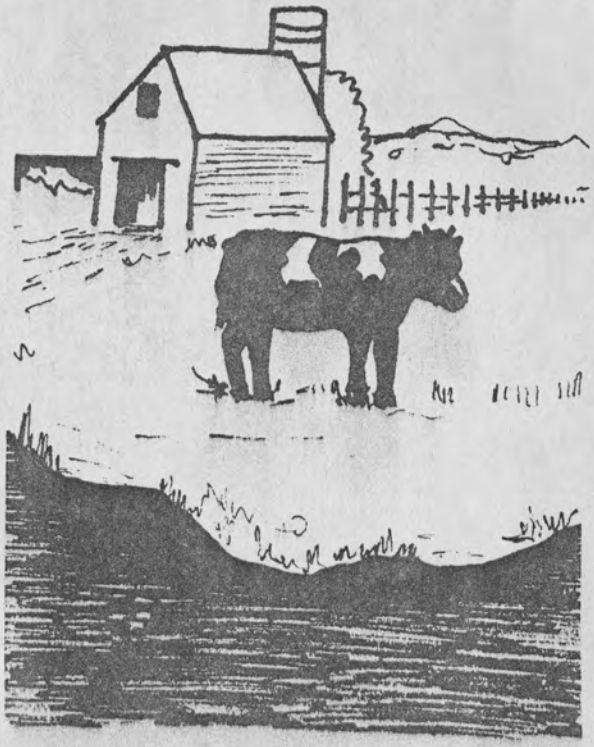
THE LEGEND OF BULL ISLAND

By Ura Bradshaw
As Told to M. Harris

One stormy, windy day, many years ago a cargo ship plowed through the Atlantic Ocean, headed toward Washington by way of the Chesapeake Bay and the Rappahannock River. The storm worsened and the Captain was forced to seek shelter close to the shore. With help from his crew, he headed up the York River and found it to be a very lovely, spacious waterway.

As the ship made its way up the river, the storm began to subside and the sun filtered through the heavy, angry clouds. The crew, which had been praying very hard, came on deck to catch a breath of the fresh air and sunshine.

Lo, in the distance, standing very erect and proud, was a golden colored bull! Thinking his prayers had been answered, a very religious crew member from India fell on his knees and began to worship the bull in the Hindu custom, thinking it to be a sign from above.



As he rose, he looked into the startled eyes of his fellow crewmen and said, "This is Bull Island".

What he really saw was the droplets of fresh rain and sunshine reflecting on a honey-colored bull as it had come out from a shelter after the storm on a point in Poquoson.

Cure-Alls

TO CURE A COUGH combine two parts honey and corn likker with one part lemon juice and take as needed. Good authority has it that one dose will do the trick--you wouldn't dare cough again as you might have to take more cough syrup!

THE BEST GAL-DURN RUB FOR RHEMATIZ and aching joints, according to a local "Bull-Islander", is: one quart witch hazel and one small bottle tincture of artica. Pour witch hazel into another bottle, then add entire bottle of artica to witch hazel bottle. Fill with witch hazel. It's ready to go!

TO EASE PAIN AND SPEED HEALING of any external injury (bruises, abrasions, etc.), use this salve. Mix enough corn likker with camphor to make it spreadable and apply to injured area. Old-timers obtained their corn likker from the courthouse after it had been confiscated--we won't ask where you get yours!

HORRORS at Harwood's Mill

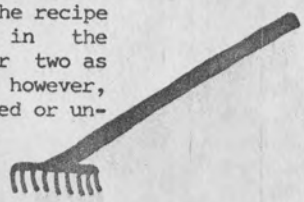
You'd better watch out when you're passing through the hollow at Harwood's Mill. Long before--and ever since--the Waterworks building and the reservoir went in, this has been a natural habitat of GHOSTS, ghosts of all sizes, shapes and dispositions, after dark and especially just before dawn. There are still some old folk of York County who can relate some terrible tales about these eerie souls and their doings.

Let's Go Clamming

Clams are shy varmints and live under the sand, so to go clamming your most important tool is a rake (preferably one with long teeth that curve in toward the handle slightly). Put on some old sneakers and head for the water with rake gripped firmly in right hand.

Many hardy souls like to go out in water chest high and do their raking, but some of us less daring prefer to wade in shallow water or wait until the tide starts falling. Either way, it takes plenty of muscle to dig the clam rake into the sandy bottom and pull it toward you. Theoretically, when you lift your rake up, you will be rewarded with clams resting on the teeth. With experience you will recognize a good clamming spot by kneading the sand with your feet and feeling them.

The large clams are used for making chowder (you'll need from 25 to 50) or fritters. The very small ones are excellent for steaming. Clams are also delicious dipped in corn meal and fried or, for an adventure in good eating, try the recipe below. Don't keep clams in the refrigerator over a day or two as they deteriorate quickly; however, they can be frozen, opened or unopened, until needed.



STUFFED CLAMS IN SHELLS

2 cups ground clams
1 egg
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons worchestershire sauce
1 tablespoon parsley flakes
1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese

Mix these ingredients together and set aside (clams may be ground in blender, if desired).

1/4 cup butter
3 strips diced, fried bacon
1/4 cup flour
1/3 cup each chopped celery, green pepper and onion
1 scant cup of milk

Saute (but don't brown) celery, green pepper, onion and bacon in butter in large frying pan. Add flour and cook well. Gradually add milk and cook until thick. Stir in clam mixture. Cook until mixture bubbles well all over. Cool. Place in clam shells. Sprinkle tops with grated cheese and paprika. Bake in 350° oven 10 to 15 minutes.

These may be frozen in a pan singly, then packed in fours or sixes. Time in the oven will be doubled for frozen clams.

What's in a Name?

York County has miles of waterfront property due to its narrow strips of land. The names given to these necks and their towns have interesting stories behind them.

BULL ISLAND was a nickname given the town of Poquoson due to the large number of cattle which were kept on the peninsula at one time (according to one theory). Though not an island, this term is still used and Poquoson citizens are referred to as Islanders. The city's official name of Poquoson is an Indian word meaning lowland. The English had a difficult time pronouncing and spelling Poquoson--hence, there are 34 different spellings recorded.

CHESAPEAKE BAY is the body of water surrounding much of the County and the Peninsula. It was originally named St. Mary's Bay by Spanish settlers, but when the English heard the Indians refer to it as Chesapeake Bay, they gladly accepted that name rather than the one created by their enemies.

COCKLETOWN, now known as GRAFTON, was named for its chief commodity. Fishermen from the necks would bring clams and oysters to Wainwright's Store porch where buyers came to inspect and purchase. The name Grafton was first introduced by a Baptist minister, John Leyland, from Grafton, Massachusetts. He named his church the Grafton Baptist Church on Brick Church Road. In 1832 some of the congregation broke away from the church due to strict ruling under the Dover Decree and became the Grafton Christian Church. In 1870, Dr. Powers in Cockletown had the postmaster, Mr. Billy Wainwright, petition the postal department and the name was changed from Cockletown to Grafton.

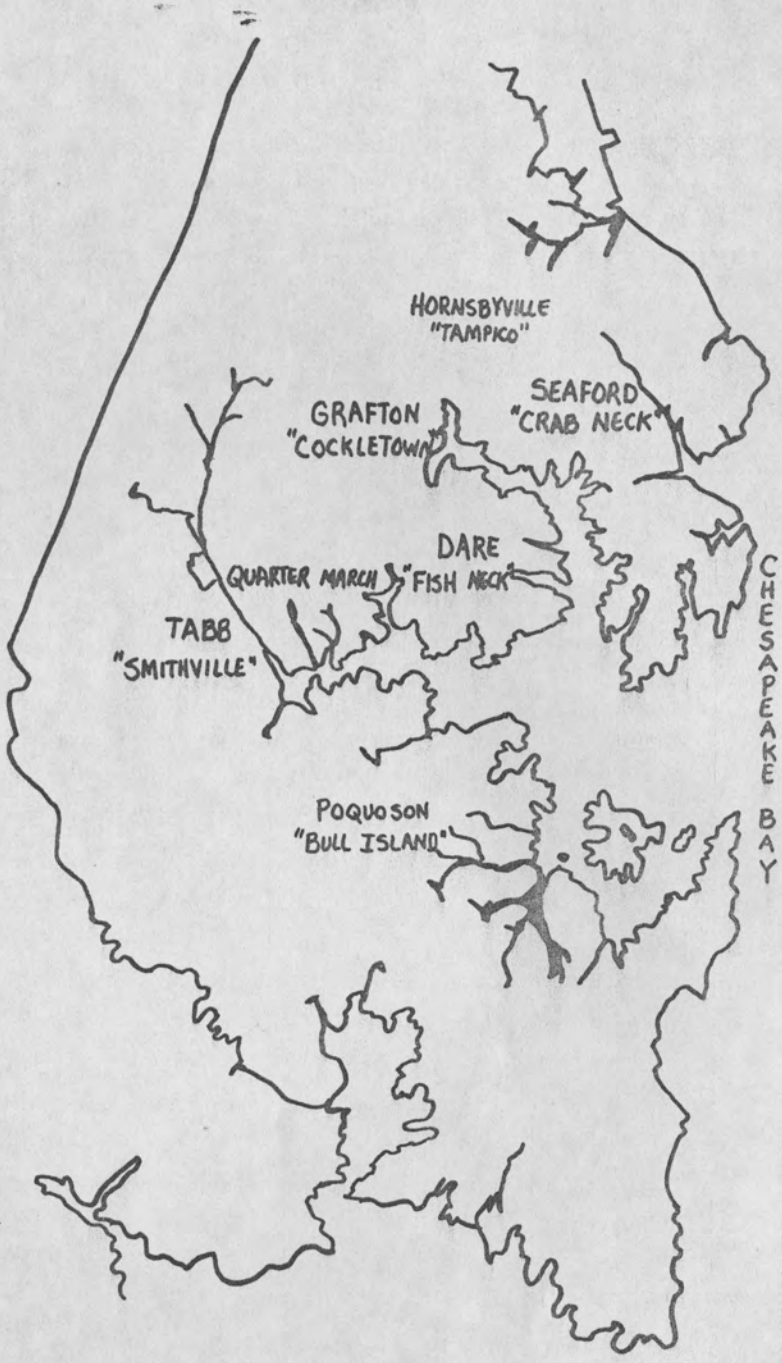
CRAB NECK, also named for its commodity, was later named SEAFORD. This name was suggested by a trawl boat captain who loved the town Seaford, Delaware.

FISH NECK was a name given to the area now known as DARE and, likewise, was so-named because their chief commodity was fish.

QUARTER MARCH, located in Grafton, was so-called because it was one-quarter of the march between Yorktown and Hampton.

TABB was previously named SMITHVILLE, and both names were derived from the same family. Mr. Levin Smith operated the first post office in the area and later his daughter, Mrs. Tabb, was post mistress at a post office on Cardinal Lane.

TAMPICO, now known as HORNSBYVILLE, got its name from women's corsets! The postmaster picked the title from huge boxes which came through his office bearing the name "Tampico Corsets". Today, in Hornsbyville, we still find the Tampico Farm.


HORNSBYVILLE
"TAMPICO"
SEAFORD
"CRAB NECK"
GRAFTON
"COCKLETOWN"
DARE
QUARTER MARCH
"FISH NECK"
TABB
"SMITHVILLE"
POQUOSON
"BULL ISLAND"
CHESAPEAKE BAY

from yesteryear . . .

HELPFUL HOUSEHOLD HINTS

MEAT TENDERIZER - Those who have worn down their teeth in masticating old, tough beef will find that carbonate of soda will remedy the evil. Be sure to cut the steaks (or beef) the day before needed into slices about two inches thick; rub all over using a small quantity of soda. Wash off the next day and cut into suitable serving pieces; cook. This same process will work on fowl, mutton and pork. Try it! All who love delicious, tender dishes of meat will find this very good.

TEETH CARE - The teeth need brushing at least before going to bed every night, and are better for being cleansed after meals. Tartar can be removed by using pumice stone reduced to powder which is rubbed on the teeth with a bit of soft wood.

IMITATION GROUND GLASS - A ready way of imitating ground glass is by dissolving Epsom salts in ale (don't use this as a beverage) and applying to glass with a brush. As it dries, it crystallizes and looks like ground glass.

FREEZING FISH—York County Style

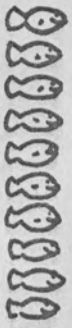
Moderns usually rely on freezing for the preservation of foods (meats and fish). This is a good method, but good packaging is essential. If air can seep through, dehydration (freezer burn) takes place and the product is either ruined entirely or much of the flavor is lost. An easy way to solve this problem with fish is as follows:

> Clean fish as desired, leave whole, split or filet. Place in plasticized paper milk carton, fill carton with water, close and freeze in upright position. After the carton is completely frozen, it may be stored upright or on its side. Thaw when ready to use and proceed as with fresh fish.

COOL FACTS

During the Civil War, Bolivar Shields, our Clerk of Courts, was ordered to take the records to Richmond. However, Bolivar, knowing of the advancement of the Union troops, decided to put them in grass sacks, row across the York River and hide them in an ice house in Matthews County. Those records stored in Richmond were burned. After the war was over, Bolivar returned to the ice house and retrieved York County's records.

SALT (corned) FISH



Salt fish nowadays is a delicacy enjoyed by a diminishing number of people. Our colonial forebearers used this method of preservation due to lack of transportation and refrigeration for fresh products.

Most any type of fish can be salted. Herring was a favorite of our inland neighbors. However, in York County and other coastal settlements, the Spot continues to be first choice.

When selecting fish for salting, clear, bright eyes and firm flesh are signs of freshness. Most fish deteriorate quickly after being removed from the water and should be cleaned immediately.

Scale fish and remove heads, if desired (old-timers did not remove heads). Split fish lengthwise (this may be done from belly or back—if done from back, it is called butterflying). Do not cut entirely in two pieces. Remove entrails. Wash thoroughly.

Cover the bottom of a well-swollen keg or crock with a layer of salt (plain or rock, not iodized), place a layer of fish, cover with a layer of salt, place a layer of fish, etc., etc. Add enough water to cover. Place an inverted plate over the fish and weight down with a brick. Cover with thick cloth. To use fish, remove as many as is needed, soak overnight in fresh water. Fry crisp, broil or boil.

vinegar taffy

3-1/3 cups granulated sugar
1/2 cup vinegar
1-1/3 cups water
Coloring, if desired

Combine ingredients in heavy saucepan. Cook without stirring until syrup reaches cracking stage when tested in cold water. Pour onto marble slab or greased platter or pan. As it cools, fold in outside edges as they start to harden. When cool enough to handle, form into ball. Then pull until porous and satiny. Pull into long ropes and snip with scissors or mark for pieces and break when cold.

BLUE CRAB

Maine has its lobster and York County has its Blue Crab. For those who have never experienced the thrill of catching one of these many-tentacled creatures, follow these simple instructions and prepare yourself for a unique adventure.

First, we must explain that there are three 'kinds' of Blue Crab:

HARD CRAB - First stage when back and claws are shell-like.
PEELER CRAB - When it starts shedding its shell (used by many fishermen for bait).
SOFT CRAB - After shell has completely disappeared--an epicurean treat!

So You Wanta Go Crabbin'

Crabbin' can be a relaxing way to spend a morning on a warm summer day. Chicken necks and backs make excellent crab bait (although some use beef bones). Tie a piece of bait and a two-ounce lead sinker on the end of a string after you've made sure your string is at least twice as long as the height of the pier. Throw out the line (being sure to hold to one end) and wait about five minutes or more. Pull the line slowly and very steadily toward you, having your crab net ready to dip the crab off the line as soon as he is visible. Often you can feel the crab pulling on the bait. Crabs are so greedy when eating that you will be able to pull most to the surface before they will release the bait. After dipping the crab out of the water, dump into a tall container--and WATCH THOSE FINGERS! After a while you will want to put out several lines, figuring you will get that many more crabs. You can tie the lines to pilings, but you won't be able to relax as much.

Now to the Eatin'

Drop live crabs into boiling water until entire varmint turns red. Remove from water and start cleaning by first removing the top shell. Then turn the crab over and lift up the apron (a rounded or triangular flap) and remove, making sure you get out all of the matter immediately under the flap. Turn over again and remove the lungs (a grayish white substance right on top) on each side of the crab. Make sure this is removed and then rinse the crab. What's left is plain good eating, although a little difficult to get at. Most folks just sit down to them this way and begin picking, others like to clean out the meat and use in casseroles or cakes.

Freezing CRAB Meat

To freeze crab meat so that it retains its freshness and sweetness, pack in containers to within one-half inch from the top. Fill the container with milk. You may use dried milk that has been reconstituted. This crab meat is excellent in deviled crab, casseroles or dips.

Sign Seen In

S W A N T A V E R N

(Located in York County, Virginia)

1722

My liquor is good
My measure is just.
But, honest Sirs
I do not trust.

It's An Old Softie

The soft crab is a mystery to many folks. They take more effort to catch than hard crabs, but are well worth the work involved. Put on sneakers (you don't want to cut your feet on shells and broken bottles) and get a crab net and a basket or float in which to lay your catch. Walk in shallow water as the tide is falling and gently poke around any boards or debris and under rocks with the handle of your net. Crabs like to nestle under objects as they shed. When walking through seaweed, drag the crab net gently, but firmly, along the bottom. When you catch a crab, gently place it in your container and, if possible, cover with damp seaweed. Soft crabs are fragile in this state and need careful handling. Don't let the hot sun dry them out.

Clean your crabs as soon as you get home by taking a sharp knife and cutting straight across the face removing the eyes and mouth in one clean cut. The crab will wiggle but 'ole-time crabbers tell us they feel no pain as they are not red-blooded creatures. Then gently lift the top shell at either end and carefully remove the lungs underneath. Do not remove the top shell. Turn over and remove the apron. Then rinse your crab in cold water and pop into a plastic bag without shaking the water off as it needs the moisture if it is to be frozen (this will prevent freezer burn). Freeze two in a small plastic bag and then place these small bags in a large plastic bag so that you may be able to take out as many servings as you need.

It'll take you forever to clean the first one or two and then you will find it is really easy and you can do a dozen or so in no time. When cooking, coat in either flour or corn meal, add salt and pepper, and pop into a skillet of hot oil over medium heat until brown on each side. You will have a meal fit for a king!

Neatness Counts

In 1944, York County's Board of Supervisors consisted of Mr. Powers of Bruton, the Reverend Renforth of Nelson, Mr. John Smith of Dare and Dr. White of Poquoson. Mr. Ben Hunt, the Commissioner of Revenue, used to meet with the Board at neighborhood stores. Mr. Hunt's office was not heated and quite crowded, though orderly. You see, Mr. Hunt's office was the TRUNK OF HIS CAR!

The Name's Smith... Or Is It Tabb ?

By Roselyn Hudgins
As told to M. Harris

The area of York County now known as Tabb was first named Smithville in honor of Levin Smith who had a general store on Yorktown Road. His establishment was located on the lot where the power lines are now, just past Tabb Terrace.

Before the post office at Smithville was established, the mail was carried by a man driving a horse-drawn, two-wheeled sulky. He traveled between Yorktown and Hampton and left mail for area residents at the Smith's store. People came from all around to the store to get their mail and catch up on the news of the community.

Mr. Smith did not "deliver" the mail--he only laid it on a desk and each "customer" would browse through to see if he had any letters.

A few years later, Mr. Smith's daughter married a man whose surname was Tabb, but she was widowed very young and forced to work. It was she who opened the first post office in Tabb and where the community of Tabb got its new name. The two-story frame dwelling which housed this first post office still stands on Cardinal Lane. It has known many families and holds bountiful memories for Mrs. Mary Octavia Smith's relatives, many still living in Tabb.

SPOON BREAD

Cook 1 cup cornmeal and 2 cups milk until the consistency of mush. Remove from heat; add 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon baking powder, 2 tablespoons salad oil and 1 cup milk. Add 3 well-beaten egg yolks; fold in 3 stiffly beaten egg whites. Bake in greased, 2-quart casserole in slow oven (325°) about 1 hour. Spoon into warm dishes; top with butter. Makes 6 servings.

The above recipe was taken from the York County 4-H Club Cookbook, 1974

Fences Were for Gardens

By Sidney Dawson
As told to A. Perdue

"When I was a kid, there was a 'no fence law' in our County which allowed animals to roam anywhere," reports Mr. Sidney Dawson. This law meant a person had to fence in his crops to protect them from the animals. Around the turn of the century, people were required to carry clubs as some animals were vicious and would attack you. The law has since been changed to require farm animals to be controlled.

Everyone in the County farmed or worked the river--or both. Money crops included potatoes, peas and onions. "One year my father planted 31 barrels of potatoes, each weighing 185 pounds," explained Sidney. It was common for farmers to sow 15 bushels of onion sets and a 100 pounds of peas. "We used to ship the peas to Norfolk and Baltimore on the 'packet line', boats owned by men who lived in the area (F. Crockett, M. Lindsey, J. White, T. Martin and S. Ironmonger). Farmers would also dry their vegetables and haul them in small boats out to larger boats where they were then taken to Norfolk or Baltimore, wherever the price was the highest.

Clams were 10 cents a hundred. Mr. Dawson's father used a backhoe type rig to collect clams along a 10-mile stretch and would leave at dawn and work 'as long as he could see'. The average haul for a day was 2,000 clams, or $2 a day. Men of the area also harvested oysters from the James River to supplement their farming incomes.

Boyhood memories for Mr. Dawson include ice being delivered by a boat at the end of Presson Lane. People would pick up a block of ice and store it in a box with sawdust for insulation. They would then chip off what was needed with a hammer and nail for iced tea, ice cream, etc.

"I also remember walking, rain or shine, about two miles each way to

school in Dare around 1910. Miss Mary Carr, who later married Robert Wainwright, was the teacher for all 11 grades.

My mother used a thing called a dairy to process our milk. It was built by my grandfather and she would put milk in it and leave it set for a day. Then the cream was skimmed off and put in another container. Us kids would have to hit this can with our knee until the milk separated from the fat. We'd continue to beat it with a paddle until we had butter or buttermilk.

The first airplane I ever saw was maybe in 1915. It probably came from Langley Field. We heard it several minutes before we could see it and it was the talk of the County for weeks as it had 'come directly over our houses'."

Postage cost one cent and our first post office was located in a house at Dare Crossroads where a store was also located. The two men, John Charles and Johnny Sparrer, who carried the mail from Dare to Grafton on alternating days each received 50 cents a day for this chore.

"I remember the first Government check I ever saw. My father got it when a man in a balloon landed on our farm. He helped the man get repacked and back up in the air. For that deed, he received $1.50 from the Government."

On the 150th anniversay of Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, there were about 250,000 people in Yorktown. Mr. Dawson operated a stand selling hot dogs and coffee--the weather was freezing, so the hot coffee outsold the hot dogs. There was so much traffic it took two hours to get from Grafton to Yorktown. Even at six o'clock in the morning, traffic was three abreast on the single road to Yorktown with no cars coming in the other direction.

Mr. Dawson still resides on Dare Road in York County, quietly observing the change from farming country to surburbia USA. As with all things, some changes he likes, others he 'could do without'.

IF ONLY WE HAD KNOWN

How I mourn.
The years
Have gone.
The fire of youth
No longer burns.
Now I wish, I long, I yearn
It were not so.
My life,
So little left.
So much to do
Too much undone.
Hours wasted,
Gone.
Mounting into years.
A blur of nothings.
I add my wail
To others gone before.
If early we had known.
If only
We had known.
Hail Youth!
Stop your headlong flight
To be grown.
Open sealed ears.
Do not add your wail
To ours.
If only
We had known.

By Patricia Anderson
1974

The Good Ole Days ?

In 1919, some of the rules female teachers in York County had to observe were as follows:

1. You will not marry during the term of your contract.
2. You are not to keep company with men.
3. You must be home between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., unless attending a school function.
4. You may not smoke cigarettes.
5. You may not dress in bright colors.
6. You may not, under any circumstances, dye your hair.
7. You must wear at least two petticoats.
8. Your dress must not be any shorter than two inches above the ankle.
9. To keep the school room neat and clean, you must: sweep the floor at least once daily; scrub the floor at least once a week with hot, soapy water; clean the blackboards at least once a day; and start the fire at 7 a.m. so the room will be warm by 8 a.m.

tabb tea tarts

3 ounces cream cheese
1/2 cup margarine
1 cup sifted flour

Let cheese and margarine soften at room temperature. Blend. Stir in flour. Chill about 1 hour. Shape into two dozen one-inch balls; place in tiny ungreased 1-3/4-inch muffin tins. Press dough on bottom and sides of cups.

PECAN FILLING:

1 egg
3/4 cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon margarine, softened
1 teaspoon vanilla
dash of dalt
2/3 cup pecans, chopped

Preheat oven to 325°. Beat together egg, sugar, margarine, vanilla and salt until smooth. Divide half the pecans among pastry-lined cups; add egg mixture and top with remaining pecans. Bake for 25 minutes or until filling sets. Cool before removing from pan.

CONTRIBUTORS

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